

February 20, 1978

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Stanford University
School of Medicine
Stanford, California 94305

Dear Josh,

Your letter of February 2 is the most encouraging one I've had since David Perkins assigned to me the chairmanship of the historical committee. I appreciate tremendously not only your interest in historical work, but also your suggestions about News Bureaus, class and lecture notes, and seeking old editions from university libraries. I shall certainly follow them. The question of laboratory notebooks has been considered. We concluded that we should recommend preserving those of the people who have made the most important discoveries, but not those of others unless the local archives is willing to preserve them.

It is most reassuring to learn of your intention to have your documents deposited at Stanford and the Rockefeller Archive Center. Having been in contact with the latter, I noted that Fred Seitz was on the Board, a position I assume you will automatically have. In that capacity, you will doubtless have a voice in its policy formulation. Perhaps you would want to consider whether the RAC should be limited to the wide range of Rockefeller connections or whether it should--with its presumably large financial backing--entertain the possibility of being a repository for other documents. Apparently The Archives of Contemporary History (ACH) at the University of Wyoming is making efforts to accommodate and acquire a very broad range of documents. I wonder whether that is a good place and whether its present objectives are likely to be maintained after the present director (Dr. Gene (!) Gressley) is no longer on the scene and, if so, whether its financial backing is reasonably secure for the long term. If you know anything about ACH, I'd be grateful for the information. I know that it has solicited documents from some geneticists (including Sears and me), but do not know whether any have agreed to deposit there. As you may surmise, I'd feel lots better if the Rockefeller Archive Center were doing the soliciting. Although the American Philosophical Society is building a good collection of genetics, I sense (perhaps wrongly) that it wants documents of only the most important geneticists. We are soliciting materials from well over 100 geneticists, and are recommending to most of them that they deposit their materials at their own universities, as you too suggest. However, some (probably most) universities do not inventory or adequately inventory such archival material. Perhaps we can eventually meet this problem with the aid of NEH grants.

Although our first efforts are directed toward individuals, I have planned from the start to turn also to institutions.

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I hope very much that you will write an editorial for Science. The time is ripe for it. As you know, we are not the only group making efforts to preserve historical materials. The Physicists have been working on this since 1961. In case you have not seen it, I'm enclosing a Xerox of their pamphlet on preservation of scientific source materials. You surely know about the Edsall-American Philosophical Society Survey of Source Materials of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. Victor McKusick is heading a comparable enterprise for Human Genetics. Our group is in close communication with the Edsall and McKusick groups. I enclose a short note I've written for circulation to members of the Genetics Society.

Your short Biographical Memoir of Tatum is a gem. I'm very pleased to have it and look forward to seeing the larger scale one I believe you are preparing for the National Academy.

I don't quite know how to interpret your invitation to stay at Abbey Aldrich Rockefeller Hall. I stayed there once, by specific invitation, when I was attending, many years ago, a meeting at Rockefeller University. I have always supposed that this was available only for such meetings and only by specific invitation on each occasion. It is indeed "a nice place to stay" and I'd be delighted to accept what seems to be your open invitation for the relatively rare occasions when I'm in New York. Are you implying that this works something like the Ciba House in London, i.e. that one simply writes the Hall to ask whether a room would be available on a certain date regardless of whether the occasion for one's visit to New York has any connection with Rockefeller?

It is very kind of you, Josh, to suggest trying to contact you when in New York. I still remember pleasantly the more frequent contacts we had when you were at Wisconsin, especially once when you and I took a long walk there along the lake and once at a meeting (Cancer Society) in Cincinnati, and much more often by mail in the days when you were interested in the flagellar antigens of Salmonella and I in the ciliary antigens of Paramecium. In more recent years I've felt very reticent about intruding on your busy and important life, so the day we had together last year at Stanford was a very special treat for me. If you don't know, you should, that I've had a very warm spot for you in my heart ever since we first met on your scientific "coming out" and again later at Cold Spring Harbor many, many years ago and that I've been intensely delighted by your successes and recognitions (and, I hope, not more jealous than the minimum humanly possible!). Unfortunately, we have only one life to live. We who didn't do as well as we wished should be able to do better if we could start again with the experience gained during the first time around.)

My apologies for these ramblings of an old-timer. With all best wishes and much affection to you and yours,

As ever,

T. M. Sonneborn

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Encs.